

**Statement of Congressman Kendrick B. Meek (FL-17)**  
**The Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee**  
**July 30, 2009**

**Cocoa Beach, Florida**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Board, thank you for this opportunity to address you and the larger NASA community. I'd like to speak today as a Floridian who is both an admirer and is in awe of the accomplishments of the human space flight program. My remarks are brief but they focus on NASA's illustrious past and how I believe we must do everything in our power to make sure that its future is every bit as distinguished. Your committee's understanding of the intricacies of space flight far outstrip my own, but as a Member of Congress, I know that NASA's future is vitally important to Florida's economy, its families and its future. Our state has invested billions of dollars to make the Space Coast the premier space exploration and space technology site in the world and I welcome the opportunity to share some thoughts on the future challenges.

This is a very definitive period in NASA's history. We have a President who has called for a new vision to guide NASA into the future, and we have two very important committees working to determine that future. Unfortunately, we also have a global recession that hamstring even the most mundane pursuits and we have a space flight program that is facing many technical difficulties.

People of a certain age can remember when a President told us that we could reach the moon. Slightly younger people can remember how, 40 years ago, that promise was fulfilled through the dedication and innovation of the NASA space program. Their accomplishment galvanized the world and solidified NASA, and the United States, as the undisputed leader in space exploration and technology.

I want for my children and their children to experience that same sense of accomplishment and reap the benefits of the scientific and technological discoveries that only an agency like NASA can provide. I want for NASA to remain the world's premier space program and to do that we need to ensure that we not only make the necessary monetary, material and technological investments, but that we also invest in the people who will take us back to the moon and beyond.

We need to invest in the engineers who will create the next generation of space shuttles and rockets and the scientists who will help us to learn all that there is to learn from the International Space Station (ISS).

I am a strong supporter of allowing the space shuttle to complete their assigned missions based not on a timeline but based on their ability to accomplish their given tasks. I also strongly support speeding up the testing and fielding of our next space vehicle. Understandably, there are many different proposals and prognostications about when we will return to the moon, and how we will get there. However, as a Floridian, it is vitally important to me that we take the steps necessary to minimize the gap between the off-ramping of the Shuttle Program and the start of the Constellation Program. A strong report from this Committee which lays out all of the pros and cons of various options at various levels of funding will be critical for the program's future and I implore your committee to look at any and all ways to mitigate the gap. Businesses across our great state and even across the country depend on workers with this unique base of knowledge; thousands of workers jobs' are at stake.

Without proactive measures, we will lose jobs in the industry and perhaps more importantly, a prolonged gap increases the risk that those workers will find employment elsewhere, that the training pipeline that readied the current crop of employees will dry up and that it will cost the state a staggering amount to restart those education and training systems from scratch. As you well know, any such gap will disproportionately affect the Space Coast as so many of its engineers and scientists are involved in operations there.

NASA has provided us with so many of the technological innovations that we've begun to take for granted, everything from home insulation to the artificial heart, have found their roots in the NASA program. So I urge the commission, as they continue their important look at the human space flight program's short term and long term prospects, to keep in mind that the program is much more than the sum of its parts. As amazing as NASA's tangible accomplishments are, its greatest strength is the intangible: the hope of discovery and innovation that it brings to future generations.